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October 19, 2011

Mr. Jim Aberg and the ID/DD Redesign Workgroup

Dear Jim and workgroup members:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input into the Core Services Paper and Preliminary Recommendations on system redesign! I do believe that semantics is the problem when discussing work opportunities for individuals with disabilities. To some the words "sheltered" and "workshop" have negative connotations. I would like to see IACP advocate changing the Iowa service code description from "sheltered work" to "facility based employment" or "organizational employment" to better align with reality and also with descriptions used by CARF. I don't think there would be an issue if these proper descriptors are used.

In addition, CRP's that offer facility based employment options are not institutions in the sense of placing people in buildings with programs that offer no choice, no integration with non disabled persons, and no meaningful or gainful employment. Unfortunately the negative perception of an institution is real but the fact is these people have the abilities to be productive members of their community by participating in facility based employment options. CRP's are modern integrated business models that benefit the individuals served, the community where they are located, and the area businesses they perform high quality work for. Our employment programs meet the needs of many individuals and provide them with support, training, and paychecks to be actively involved and successful in their community...all in a setting very similar to other small businesses with integration and interaction with non disabled persons. The focus is on ability and not on disability.

I see a recommendation is for "Community First" under the core services. Facility based employment as I described should be listed as a priority under core services because of the important role it plays in preparing individuals to be involved in the community. MIW, Inc. is considered a very important part of the Marshalltown community and central Iowa. None of our customers or stakeholders views MIW as a sheltered institution but rather an integral part of the community where individuals that are not successful in the competitive workforce can work.

I compare this wording issue to the current "no child left behind" descriptor used in the educational system. Certainly no one wants to see children fall behind in the school grade system. However, the system isn't working as hoped and changes are being discussed. Yet a new descriptor is hard to sell because no one wants to challenge the implications of the words "no child left behind."

In our industry the words "sheltered" and "workshop", and "institutionalized" are so outdated and misaligned with the service system I just don't understand why these words are not deleted and replaced with correct service descriptions. Unlike the education system's dilemma, we can change our descriptions to reflect the positive and valuable employment options that we already have...and these options are working!

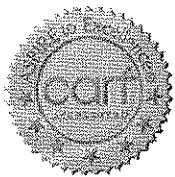
The reality is not all individuals who want to work can be successful in SE or CE. And certainly the supports and funding are not there to support the kind of efforts for those who are ready, mainly due to the poor state of the economy which results in very few if any job opportunities. So without CRP's offering facility based employment where are these people going to work? I know that without our programs many individuals will end up in more costly services...services that are undesirable to the individual, community, and funders.

Please consider the negative impact of supporting a recommendation to "phase out in a thoughtful manner" these important employment services that many individuals need and chose to participate in. And what is meant by "thoughtful manner"? How do you tell people "we thought of you but now you don't have a job"? A job is the basis for success regardless of where the job is.

Thank you for your efforts on the ID/DD system redesign. I know it is a monumental task but certainly one that is of critical importance to the people we all serve.

Respectfully,

Rich Byers  
President & CEO



**Employment Services for Individuals with Disabilities**

## HAVE WE COME FULL CIRCLE?

In the mid 1960s individuals with intellectual disabilities were not necessarily expected to engage in meaningful work. Some worked in family businesses or on family farms. Some did general day labor for neighbors or friends. Others worked as "helpers" for seasonal work. Few had a real voice or real choices in their vocational future after finishing school.

Families recognized that their family members had much to offer and gain from employment. They solicited community members to partner with them to advocate for change. As a result, Mid-Iowa Workshops was opened in 1967. Today the terms "workshop" and / or "sheltered work" are perceived by many to have negative meanings. A term that perhaps more appropriately represents what happens at MIW, and many other similar organizations, is "Facility Based Employment". Currently, in the media and in the field of disability services there is a negative bias towards this type of employment. The emphasis has shifted to supported employment, customized employment and self-employment. Individuals are still dependent upon service professionals to assist and support them. Funding needed to pay for services, of course, brings the issue into the political arena.

In the past 10 years there have been substantial changes in services and funding available to help individuals obtain their employment goals. In some areas, this shift goes so far as to call for the closing of Facility Based Employment programs. Some people in the field of disability advocacy have conjectured that it should be the goal of Facility Based Employment programs to exit all the people they serve to employment in the community or be engaged in planned obsolescence. Really? Do we want to take away the choice to have work with support and accommodations that are unavailable in the community for those who need it? Should it ever be a case of all or nothing?

Think for a moment about nondisabled young adults searching for appropriate employment after high school, a training program or college. These individuals consider many things as they look at a potential employer. They are interested in the nature of the work, as well as the culture of the company. How is it that we expect individuals with intellectual disabilities to view employment options differently than their non-disabled peers? Common sentiments shared by employees at MIW are, "This is work I can do." "This is where my friends are." and "Staff help me when I need it." MIW supports the full spectrum of possibilities and informed choices for individuals with disabilities. We applaud and celebrate the accomplishments of those who move on to supported employment in the community, those who work both in the community and at MIW and those who work solely at MIW.

Amid all the changes in funding, politics and the changing tide of trends in the field the need for advocacy continues. In the current state of the economy and ever tightening

budgets for services we must not be passive. We must look back to all the efforts and involvement of the community it took to bring about the existence of MIW. It wasn't easy then. It's not easy now. It is a different time. More than 40 years later we must remain aware and engaged in our community, in our state, and in our country to ensure individuals with disabilities continue to have **a voice and a choice**.